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PROJECT PEACE PIPE, INDIAN YOUTH PRE-TRAINED FOR PEACE CORPS DUTY.

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IN A COOPERATIVE PROJECT WITH THE PEACE CORPS, THE OKLAHOMANS FOR INDIAN OPPORTUNITY (OIO) ORGANIZATION TRAINED A GROUP OF AMERICAN INDIAN YOUNG PEOPLE DURING THE SUMMER OF 1967 FOR SERVICE IN LATIN AMERICA. THE MAJOR HYPOTHESIS UNDER WHICH OIO PLANNED THE TRAINING PROGRAM WAS THAT INDIAN YOUNGSTERS, BECAUSE OF THEIR LACK OF SELF-CONFIDENCE, FELT THEY HAD LITTLE TO CONTRIBUTE TO PERSONS OVERSEAS. AS A RESULT OF THIS HYPOTHESIS, A THREE-PART CURRICULUM WAS DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED FOR THEIR TRAINING, CONSISTING OF SPANISH LANGUAGE SKILLS, COMMUNICATION SKILLS, AND ATTITUDINAL TRAINING. OTHER FEATURES OF THE PROGRAM INCLUDED--(1) A REGULAR PEACE CORPS ASSESSMENT PROCESS (FOR THE TRAINEES), CONDUCTED BY TWO PSYCHOLOGISTS, (2) A CULTURAL ENRICHMENT PROGRAM, AND (3) A SERIES OF SOCIAL ACTIVITIES. IN CONCLUSION, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT PEACE CORPS SERVICE DOES HAVE APPEAL FOR MEMBERS OF MINORITY GROUPS. HOWEVER, REACHING PERSONS WHO ARE CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH THESE GROUPS AND WHO ARE SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY DEPRIVED PROBABLY REQUIRES SPECIAL RECRUITMENT EFFORTS. THIS ARTICLE APPEARS IN THE "JOURNAL OF AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION," VOL. 7, NO. 2, JANUARY 1968, PP. 21-26. (ES)

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Project Peace Pipe

Indian Youth Pre-Trained For Peace Corps Duty

Mrs. Fred R. Harris and Leon H. Ginsberg

IN A UNIQUE, cooperative effort, a group of American Indian young people were pre-trained for Peace Corps service in Latin America during the summer of 1967. Called "Project Peace Pipe," the program drew upon the resources of Peace Corps, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the University of Oklahoma and Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity.

Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, which has its headquarters in Norman, is a non-profit organization funded by the U. S. Office of Economic Opportunity. Its program focuses on a better and fuller life for Oklahoma's large, non-reservation Indian population. Among the programs it uses in working toward its objectives are local community development, work experience and placement, and youth activities.

For a number of reasons, a joint project with Peace Corps seemed in keeping with OIO objectives. Involving American Indians in the Peace Corps could provide significant work experience for the volunteers. The existence of American Indian Peace Corps volunteers would provide role models, OIO hoped, for Indian youngsters throughout the United States. Of equal significance, OIO believed, would be the skills which the Peace Corps volunteers would learn. The development of talents for organization and skill in mobilizing community action would be applicable to the problems of Indian communities in all parts of the United States where skilled Indian leadership is needed, but often unavailable. In addition, Peace Corps experience would be a foundation for later service by some Indian youngsters in the Agency for International Development and other federal agencies and programs.

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Development of the Project

In late 1966, OIO officials discussed with officials of Peace Corps their concern that few American Indians had served as volunteers, as well as a plan which OIO had developed to meet their concern. The Peace Corps officials agreed that they were concerned about developing a "WASP" image which would make Peace Corps seem inaccessible to socio-economically deprived minority group youngsters. The OIO plan envisioned the recruitment and pre-training of a group of American Indians in several Latin American nations. The details were mutually developed and agreed upon by Peace Corps and OIO for a five-week, pre-training program.

Through a grant from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a brochure describing the project was prepared and distributed in areas of concentrated Indian population throughout the United States. BIA education officials were asked to assist in recruiting pre-trainees.

The major recruitment effort centered upon direct recruitment by former Peace Corps volunteers. They were employed by OIO through the BIA grant. With the help of OIO staff members, these recruiters visited colleges with heavy Indian enrollments, including some BIA schools, and large Indian population areas.

Selection of Pre-Trainees

In conversations between OIO and Peace Corps officials, it was determined that special criteria would be used for selecting Peace Pipe's pre-trainees. Although 18 year olds are eligible for Peace Corps, it had been that agency's experience that the volunteers who adjust and perform most ably are at least 20, and it was assumed that this would be the best minimum age for the Project Peace Pipe recruits. While Peace Corps has no specific educational requirements, the majority of volunteers have some college work, and most of these hold degrees. It was agreed that in most cases Peace Pipe trainees would have high school diplomas and preferably some college work. In some cases, exceptional skills useful for Peace Corps service would be substituted for educational attainment.

Most important was a decision to give special handling to the Peace Pipe trainees. It was decided that personal interviews by the recruiters and OIO officials would be given some weight in determining whether to invite an applicant to pre-training, although interviews are not normally used in the Peace Corps selection process. Relatively less weight would be given to the large quantities of written references usually required for Peace Corps invitations to training. It had been

Peace Corps' experience that lower socio-economic class applicants often have difficulty in obtaining written references.

Through the recruitment and selection process 76 applications were secured, and from these 34 were invited for training. Eleven pre-trainees accepted the invitation to participate and reported to Norman for Project Peace Pipe.

Design of a Training Program

Perhaps the greatest challenge in the conduct of the project was the design of a program to help American Indians satisfactorily complete Peace Corps training and enter Peace Corps service. It was the belief of the OIO planners that there were identifiable reasons for the low numbers of Indians in the Peace Corps.

The major hypothesis under which OIO planned the training program was that Indian youngsters felt they had little to contribute to persons overseas. In other words, it was assumed that lack of confidence was a major barrier for Indians interested in Peace Corps service. It was assumed also, however, that Indians could contribute as much or more in Peace Corps roles as any other group of people. So the problem became one of recruiting Indians and bolstering their self-confidence by helping them develop sufficient self-awareness and skills to increase the possibility of their effectively serving in Peace Corps.

The major problem, it appeared, was not overseas service. Rather, it was the ability of Indian young people to survive Peace Corps training. Peace Corps training is usually three months or more in length. It is academically and psychologically demanding for most trainees. In addition to the pressures of selection for Peace Corps service (trainees are assessed by psychologists and other staff members during training to determine how well the trainees would perform as volunteers), the composition of the training group itself was perceived as potentially threatening for some American Indian trainees. The typical training group has many college graduates—often a majority—including a sprinkling from prestigious Ivy League and large state universities. While the vigors of overseas life could pose adjustment problems to middle and upper socio-economic class volunteers, they would be less frightening, it seemed, to reservation-reared or rural Indian young persons. It was the fellow trainee group which could cause the most serious difficulties—perhaps a failure in training—for the American Indian.

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The Pre-Training Curriculum

In consultation with Peace Corps officials, OIO developed a curriculum for pre-training which would, it was hoped, build the self-confidence of the pre-trainees through the development of skills useful in the formal and informal elements of Peace Corps training. A three-part curriculum was developed and implemented consisting of Spanish language skill, communication skill, and attitudinal training.

Spanish Language Skill. Perhaps the most demanding part of Peace Corps training is foreign language development. Most of the trainees' hours are spent learning the language used in the country in which they will serve. Developing sufficient familiarity with the language for overseas service is difficult and frustrating, as is any effort to learn a second language.

Thus, it seemed a certainty that Peace Pipe's pre-trainees would make a better adjustment to Peace Corps training and equal or exceed the ability of their non-Indian peers if they had some prior instruction in Spanish.

Therefore, five hours per day were set aside for language instruction in small groups with experienced Peace Corps language instructors. Audio-lingual methods were used. Spanish music and meal time conversations were added to the experience so that knowledge, skill, and a feel for the language could be developed.

Communication Skill. It was the assumption of the planners that some stereotypes of American Indians (stoic, shy, non-aggressive) are not based upon personality or even cultural characteristics. Rather, some Indians often seem shy and non-aggressive because they lack confidence in their ability to communicate with non-Indians or lack experience in doing so.

It seemed possible to arm the Peace Pipe trainees with oral and written communication skills. The communication skills component was designed to focus upon reading comprehension, organization of written materials, effective writing, public speaking, and small group discussion. These skills were to be developed for their intrinsic value. In addition, however, they were considered means of helping the pre-trainees develop sufficient confidence to speak up in classes, talk freely with their fellow-trainees, and write adequate statements in assessment and test situations. Speech and English teachers handled this component of the program.

Attitudinal Training. It is almost axiomatic when there is discussion of problems faced by American Indians to say that some of their problems are attitudinal. However, there are few clear statements of

which attitudes cause problems and even fewer directions on how attitudes may be changed.

It was the belief of the OIO planners of Project Peace Pipe that the attitudes most likely to handicap the pre-trainees was a lack of self-confidence.

The attitudinal training included a one-week course led by teachers from the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago, which has had experience in "imaginal education," thrice-weekly small discussion groups with an "attitudinal" trainer, who was a social scientist, and a conscious effort in all classroom counseling and other situations to give the pre-trainees an opportunity to develop self-confidence.

Other Features of the Program

Although the items outlined above were the bases for the training program, there were some other elements. For example, a regular Peace Corps assessment process was conducted by two psychologists. They interviewed the trainees frequently, held weekly meetings with the training coordinators and prepared summaries on each trainee to facilitate their eventual assignments to training programs. Assessment and consultation were also provided by two psychiatrists.

A cultural enrichment program was provided. This included attendance at selected movies and plays, chosen by the trainees with the help of attitudinal training and communication skills staff members.

Social activities also were provided at the homes of Peace Pipe staff members. A banquet, featuring an address by U. S. Senator Fred R. Harris of Oklahoma, and attended by the trainees, faculty members and University of Oklahoma administrators, was held early in the program.

The five-week program was conducted under the direction of the University of Oklahoma in student apartments. Most of the staff members, including the project director, had extensive experience in Peace Corps training. Because the trainee group was small and the staff adequate in size, close relationships developed between the staff and the trainees.

Conclusions

An appropriate evaluation of Project Peace Pipe cannot, perhaps, be made before two years expire and the trainees return from their service in Latin America. However, some conclusions can be drawn now.

It would appear that Peace Corps service does have appeal for members of minority groups, including American Indians. However,

reaching persons who are closely identified with their groups and who are also socio-economically deprived probably requires special recruitment efforts at selected places in the United States. Normal Peace Corps advertising and recruiting efforts, which focus on major college campuses, are not enough.

While the answers to problems faced by minority group youngsters are too complex for any five-week program to resolve, it does seem possible to identify the specific blocks which may exist for specific desired activities. For example, the Peace Pipe trainees lacked self-confidence and skill in communication. It may be impossible to eliminate such lacks in any short range endeavor. However, it appears to be quite possible to help people develop tools for coping with problems such as these. In other words, complete solutions to problems may be unnecessary if appropriate coping devices are developed.

Currently Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity and Peace Corps are negotiating an expanded Project Peace Pipe for 1968. Tentative plans call for its being somewhat longer than the first program. A larger number of trainees is being sought, and it is presently planned that Negroes, Mexican-Americans, and other minority group members will be recruited in addition to American Indians.